



PANHANDLE HEALTH DISTRICT I

Environmental Health
Vital Statistics
Home Health
Family and Community Health
Health Promotion
Infectious Disease Control
WIC and Nutrition Services
Immunizations

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December 24, 1996

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FCC Mail Room

Office of the Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
Room 222
1919 M Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20554

Reference: CC Docket No. 96-45

To Whom It May Concern:

I realize this letter is late, however, after seeing the attached article in a local rural newspaper I felt it important to let you know that the seven health districts in Idaho are excluded from this telecommunication system that other health professionals are free to use. The seven health districts have offices in all 44 counties of Idaho and a telecommunications system like this would be a great asset to the public health professionals, the public in general, the schools that we work with and complimentary to the hospital's similar system.

Although this is late, it is a good example of how public health is expected to do a great deal for the community but remains inadequately funded. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Larry (mu)

Larry M. Belmont
Director

/m
enc.

c: Senator Dirk Kempthorne
Senator Larry E. Craig
Representative Mike Crapo
Representative Helen Chenoweth
Nancy Rawding, NACCHO

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To: LMB
From: Rynda

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could we tap
into this?

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FCC Mail Room

Communicate via airwaves; teleconferencing hits SM

Televisions have been blamed for wasting people's time since being mass produced forty years ago.

The two televisions' screens which face the narrow conference table in Benewah Community Hospital's conference room, however, are there to save time and money, Mike Boyd, the hospital's administrator said.

The televisions, and the streamlined camera that lies atop one of them are part of an interactive video system that can transmit images from St. Maries to similar televisions at five sites in northern Idaho, he said. Groups of individuals in different places can simultaneously interact by using the new system.

A one-hour meeting at Kootenai Medical Center in Coeur d'Alene that once required a half day away from the job, can now be attended by physicians in St. Maries, or Bonners Ferry with equal ease -- by grabbing a cup of coffee and switching on the equipment.

"If you think of how much trouble it is to get someplace for a meeting," Mr. Boyd said, "The realities of travel are that a lot of time is wasted for a one-hour meeting."

The camera sends speakers' images to participants, he said, and the televisions allow speakers and audience to maintain eye contact. Because of the pictures' clarity, documents and charts can be transmitted as well.

It's all there but the handshake.

The \$40,000 equipment in the Benewah Community Hospital is part of a \$450,000 video teleconferencing system that was installed in five area hospitals and North Idaho College, Mr. Boyd said. It was paid with a federal grant and match money from participating groups.

In the future, family doctors may use the system to consult with specialists in larger medical centers on diagnoses. That would require additional equipment and expenses, he said.

Major payers such as Medicare, haven't yet agreed on a fee payment system for physicians who assist in diagnoses or treatment via telemedicine, he said.

In addition to conferencing, and diagnostics the new system has other, equally valuable uses, Mr. Boyd said.

"There's an RN here who

wants to get her bachelor's degree in nursing," he said. "To travel to Spokane and back, on their calendar and time schedule is extraordinarily difficult. Now she can do from St. Maries what could have required travelling to get her degree."

To communicate with other systems outside of the state requires more connections be made from the switch board at NIC. System users are charged an \$11 per hour access fee.

Other facilities that have obtained teleconferencing equipment include Bonner General Hospital, Boundary Community Hospital, Kootenai Medical Center, Shoshone Medical Center, and North Idaho College.

Mr. Boyd said the Benewah County Hospital system "should be available for community use," for emergency medical training and business conferences.

"The more of this kind of equipment we have, the more willing people are to live in rural America," he said. --- Ralph Bartholdt